

A Guide to the Militia Payrolls and Supply Vouchers for the Chesapeake Incident of the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts, 1807-1812

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There are no access restrictions.

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There are no use restrictions.

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Biographical Information

In 1807, four sailors who had been pressed into service by the Royal Navy and escaped to Portsmouth, Virginia in order to enlist aboard the Chesapeake and escape British service. This event came to garner national attention. Commodore James Barron conducted an investigation of the accused deserters and found that William Ware, Daniel Martin, and John Strachan were Americans who were previously impressed by the British Navy and had since escaped. The fourth, Jenkins Ratford, was a legitimate British sailor deserting the Royal Navy. However, he enlisted under an alias and was not identified by Barron during his investigation. The British Vice Admiral responded by ordering that if the Chesapeake was found at sea, it was to be detained and the deserters recovered. On 22 June 1807, the British ship Leopard fired on and seized the United States frigate Chesapeake. Governor William H. Cabell ordered the militia in eastern Virginia into service to defend the state against and anticipated invasion. The cities of Portsmouth and Norfolk passed resolutions critical of the British fleet and refused to resupply or repair Royal Navy ships in port. The militia were discharged shortly thereafter, on 15 July. Although the crisis was over in less than a month, many citizens still were trying to settle their accounts as late as 1812. In October 1807, George III issued an order to continue the impressment of British sailors, specifically aboard American ships. President Thomas Jefferson, seeing limited military solutions, responded by enacting the Embargo Act in December of 1807.

Scope and Content

Includes militia payrolls and supply vouchers related the the Chesapeake Incident, 1807-1812. Payrolls include name of soldier, rank, place of enlistment, dates of service, disbursement of rations, and rates of pay. Vouchers include the name of person to whom money is owed, amount, date voucher was submitted, when they were called upon, duration of service, regiment, and in some cases, debts owed to private citizens for use of their property by the militia. Private property typically used by the militia include debts paid for rations used, wagons, replacement wheels, horses, doctors care of sick soldiers, treatment by surgeons, and enslaved persons use for manual labor. Localities mentioned in these records include: Accomack, Brunswick, Dinwiddie, Fluvanna, Goochland, Greensville, Hampton, Henrico, Isle of Wight, Leesburg, Louisa, Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Norfolk, Northampton, Petersburg, Portsmouth, Richmond City, Smithfield, Southampton, Warwick, and Williamsburg.

Arrangement

Documents are arranged chronologically within each type of record.

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Box 1

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